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Saturday

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Title: [Futuwwah: The Essence of a Never-Ending Journey](#)

Futuwwah and Adab: Overcoming Ignorance

Dinner blessing: Bismi-Llāhi-r-Rahmāni-r-Rahīm. O Allah, among us are people who are ill, in need of Your Shifāt, people who are in pain and in need of relief from their pain, people who are distracted and need attraction to Your Jedhb, people who are thinking of themselves before they think of others, and forgetting that You are the Seer of all things. O Allah, give us gratitude and appreciation for all that You give us, and the means through which You give it to us. *Amin.*

Suhbat: Asalaamu aleikum. I don't know whether you have noticed or not, but one can be making progress on the spiritual path and still be in a lot of ignorance and darkness. I guess you could say the greatest problem is ignorance. In a way, that's what the path is about. It is a way that is filled with twists and turns, valleys and mountains and hills, dangers and places of safety and security. Because gaining height in any spiritual journey begins with coming closer to Allah, and because Allah is always near, this ascension or step-by-step process, stairway (or whatever the analogy is) involves any spiritual encounter or experience that brings one to realization, no matter what degree it may be, of the nearness of Allah. It could be a momentary sense of compassion that comes in a moment and leaves in a moment, or it can be something that is sustained for much longer.

It can be said it is a process of the falling away of the veils that obstruct the vision or the seeing and hearing, awareness, consciousness, understanding of that intimate or Divine Presence in our lives. Because there are thousands upon thousands upon veils of darkness and ignorance of varying density (which I'm sure we have all experienced), which can blind us or obscure our vision or our relationship with Allah, there can be many different ways of awakening, too. Just because one has certain experiences in which some veil or two are lifted, it doesn't mean that a person has realized the Divine Presence to the fullest extent possible. People become very confused. They confuse themselves by their own knowledge and their own assumed knowledge and wisdom. There can be a lot of confusion on the path.

There have been many instances in which people have had certain spiritual experiences when the veil has been lifted for a moment, and it drops again but they don't know it. They come to conclusions that are incorrect, especially the assumption that the veils have been removed and what they are seeing is the absolute truth and that's it. These are very subtle matters, and the person needs therefore to have a subtle approach to it, and to hold tightly to the guidance one is provided. Nonetheless, one can make that spiritual progress while still in a state of relative ignorance. A person can come to know some of the different aspects of this journey or the path that they have traveled through, or they are presently traveling in. But the fact is what lies ahead of us symbolically or realistically, spiritually and physically is relatively unknown.

Consequently there is a tendency for people, travelers on the path to believe—due to certain weaknesses or imperfections like anger, impatience, or arrogance—that they are near the end of the journey. They believe they have ascended to great heights of spiritual knowledge, but lack humility. The fact is “it ain't over til the fat lady sings.” I don't know how to put that back into the original Arabic or Farsi. The journey is a long journey, and in fact I think from a certain perspective, there is no real end to it.

It is a process. Since Allah is infinite, and the way in which Allah expresses those divine qualities are infinite, one can be, will be and should be engaged forever in a journey. One can reach certain stations where it is no longer a journey of resistance, or a journey of pain and suffering, but it is a journey of submission and trust. It becomes more like sitting on a train traveling through the beautiful forests, mountains and rivers, or being on the open seas and sailing, knowing that you have put everything else at rest while on this journey. That journey spiritually is *hajj*. You have your life in order; you make *hajj* in *ihram* and experience that beauty. On our journey, some of the states are very transitory and some more lasting. Some come in a blink of an eye, and some depart in a blink of an eye. A moment of compassion, a moment of love, a moment of repentance, a moment of humility, a momentary insight—these are *hal*, gifts bestowed upon us by Allah to remind us that Allah is present in the moment. Some of the last a lot longer, and they become way stations along the way that you never go back from.

When qualities like repentance, patience, gratitude, and love become absorbed like water—just like when you walk in the rain and your clothing absorbs the rain—when your self becomes absorbed by those good qualities, they become part of the fabric of your life. Then they give expression to very significant experiences. If you are patient, you will have significant experiences. If you are repentant, you will have significant experiences. Because the gifts that come from Allah to us come according to our ability to receive them and who we are. If we have accomplished sincerity, submission or repentance, and we really have humility, then what we will see of this Divine Presence will be different than what we would see if we didn't have those qualities, if we hadn't established that *maqam*, if you will. Because Allah is not far; Allah is near.

We all know we can drive down the road and not see things. “Did you see that hawk?” “No.” “Did you see that deer?” “No.” You are present but you don't see it; your mind is

somewhere else. “There are robins living in that bush; did you see them?” “No.” It’s not that I didn’t want to see them, but my attention was elsewhere. When our attention is on that Divine Presence on a continuous basis, we see the manifestations of the Divine Presence. Sometimes we are raised to a height by the Grace/*Nai’ma* of Allah, and then we are lowered again very quickly. Sometimes you walk with a state of clarity in your mind, and something disturbs you and all the clarity is gone. Sometimes it happens that this juxtaposition of clarity and lack of clarity, of upliftment and being lowered again is a precursor or foretaste of what is to come later on in a state of permanency. Sometimes it is there to motivate us to work harder, and sometimes it is there to show us what could have been, but won’t be because of some flaw we have allowed to happen.

There are times when people are transported, like Prophet Muhammed (saws) on Isra Miraj, to spiritual distances as a gift from Allah and His Grace. Since everyone is different, people respond in different ways. The foundation of all that I am saying goes back to *adab* and *futuwwah*, to take these gifts as a means of functioning, as a cue for us to develop our character, piety and devotion in such a way that more of these gifts flow to us, and to have a sense of humility, which is necessary in a situation like this. It is necessary to feel that what comes to you, you don’t deserve; but it is a gift from Allah. You think, “Oh my God, I’m a miserable human being!” But this gift, this blessing, comes to you. You realize you are still a beneficiary of the legacy Allah has created for you.

It is very hard to quantify, to describe all the stations and states that one goes through. But it is not hard to talk about and understand a) the value of *adab* and *futuwwah* as the foundation. It is not hard to understand b) what behavior, attitude and guidance we should take to arrive at a state of mind that is at home with selflessness, compassion and kindness, and a kind of altruistic view of human potential. This is the character of the Prophet (sal), of the friends, lovers, family, and of the Sahabah. This attitude, this mentality is simply good *adab* that amounts to the fact that one is virtually in a

continuous state of devotion, or worship. It is good *adab* in the sense that it is a method by which we constantly remember Allah. Allah says in Qur'an:

Nay they are the friends of Allah, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve.

This is the type of person who is operating from *futuwwah*. There are signs that one can recognize in others and, *inshā'a-llāh*, in their own self. If you are satisfied with little for yourself and you want more for others, this is a sign of *futuwwah*. Instead of looking at the faults of others, you look at your own faults. This is not only good *adab*, this is *futuwwah*. You respond to people's criticism, anger, cruelty with kindness. If you have the opportunity to punish them, you don't punish them because they made some mistake. You bring joy into the lives of your friends, and meet their needs without them asking. This is *futuwwah*. You prefer the well being, the comfort and ease of your brothers over your own self. You relieve them of any difficulty that you see that they have with a kind word, with some aid, some physical help, some advice, whatever it may be. The intention is to relieve them of the burden of their problem.

You treat your life as if you are hosting people. You serve whatever you have to your brother or sister, even if you only have a drop of water. These are signs. They are very important signs, which should not be left until the end of your life. These are attitudes which can be developed in childhood and youth, and they should be. Sulami said in his *Futuwwah* book, "*When the light of the heart is reflected on the beauty of the face, that beauty you see is futuwwah.*" He also says, "*A friend of Allah must have affection like the sun. When the sun rises, it is beneficial to all irrespective to whether they are Muslims, Christians or Hindus.*" And from Moinuddin Chishti (ra):

A friend of Allah must be as generous as a river. We all get water from the river to quench our thirst. It doesn't discriminate whether we are good or bad, are

related or are strangers. It gives us its water. In the same way, we have to be hospitable, just like the earth is hospitable. We are raised in its cradle, in its lap, yet it is always under our own feet.

These are hopefully inspirational ways of thinking, things to aspire to. When one is at the early states of learning, like when a child is learning math for the first time or language for the first time; or just studying English grammar for the first time, you don't give them a Shakespearean text to read. There is a saying in the Middle East: "*The food of adults is poison to children.*" We are truly spiritual and intellectual children until we are mature enough to learn and master our own traditions, our own practices, to safely entrust ourselves to delve into the Qur'an and Hadith, until we can be humble and assume that we lack knowledge and understanding, and that we should approach these things with a high degree of care. I received a stupid letter from someone today, though sincere in some way. I wrote back in a good *adab* way saying I don't feel good making too many assumptions about what I understand or what I see in other people, unless I have a direct link with them, and unless I really understand what they are saying and doing. I don't assume that I have all this knowledge and understanding.

I think that it is very important that we understand where we are and where we are not. When we look at the Muslim *ummah* today, what do we see? We see that large numbers of people are suffering from ignorance of just simple knowledge. They are illiterate. There are many people in the *ummah* today who are just ignorant. You can't say that just going to school makes you not ignorant, because there are plenty of people in this country who go to school but are still ignorant. They are bigoted and biased. The crimes of bigotry and prejudice have increased tremendously, just in the last week because of the idiot Pakistani young man. People are suffering from ignorance. The thing that should be scary is ignorance will be a permanent state if *adab* is lost.

Also, when we look into the other parts of the world, we see that people are impoverished. They are forced to do things that are not what they would choose to do if they weren't impoverished. They don't seize the opportunity to be educated, because they cannot afford it. They have to do other things. They don't have the opportunity to raise themselves from a state of ignorance or small amount of knowledge to one of high levels of knowledge and responsibility. They wind up losing their *adab* and having to do whatever they can to survive. Working for people who are tyrants and working for people who are corrupt, they pick up the habits of corruption.

A man who started the American University in Central Asia and then left it was starting a new university. I asked, why are you starting a new university? He said, because of corruption. I want to start a university where people actually have to study to get their grades instead of handing in their paper for the teacher to sign off on with an envelope in it. Poverty, combined with ignorance, lack of ethics and lack of *adab* keep people in a state of ignorance. They don't necessarily think they are, but they are. They don't understand what is happening in the world or what their role is. They don't understand human beings. So many things destroy us, and there is no doubt that the real wealth is the wealth of a soul and a heart that is fully developed. There is no doubt that in order to maintain a person's *adab*, a person's dignity with Allah and then with human beings, you have to have a soul whose dependency is on Allah.

The Prophet Mohammed (sal) in talking about poverty said, "***Poverty is nearly a type of disbelief.***" Why? Because of the system of zakat, and because Muslims have always been committed to study, to knowledge. If the system is working, then there shouldn't be poverty. Poverty comes about because, in theory, a person has divorced themselves from the source of knowledge and from seeking knowledge, and have kept themselves in a state of ignorance. Then of course there are other people who keep people in ignorance, we won't get into history. The idea behind this is by having good *adab*, by considering each other (in the ways of the list I gave you earlier) and by acting in this way, by not

being selfish and heedless, by being cooperative and creating a sense of real *ummah* between yourself and your brothers and sisters, then if you are in poverty, it is because you chose to be, not because you are forced to be.

No student who is sincere in his heart and in his studies should ever have to suffer concerns over just material well-being. Whatever Allah gives you, you will be grateful for. You won't be suffering if you have nothing, and you won't be distracted if you have a lot. At the core is your knowledge and good *adab*. If you find yourself in that kind of state of impoverishment where there is resentment and feelings of loss and frustration, anxiety, and angst—which we all feel to some degree, of course, when we don't have enough money to pay a bill, when there is a sickness we don't know how to take care of, or when there is a need we don't know how to fulfill—but if we have the right attitude and the right *adab*, then we know that things will go well. To have that, we have to purify our intention, and be sincere in pursuing what we pursue *fī sabīli-Llāh*, and not for anything else—not for money, not for name, not for fame, not to put it on your resume. You pursue what you are pursuing *fī sabīli-Llāh*, for the honor of the name you carry, and for the honor of being in the line of the Prophet Muhammed (sal).

Remember, Allah promised those people who have piety that they will be provided for in ways that they didn't expect. Just to expect that what comes to you is coming from Allah and is accepted. Allah says:

And for those who fear Allah, He prepares a way out, and He provides for him from sources he never could imagine. If anyone puts his trust in Allah, Allah is sufficient for him, for Allah will surely accomplish his purpose. For verily for all things has Allah appointed a due proportion.

Also, in a more worldly sense, people of means, successful people, themselves are successful because they are the means to revivify and invigorate our world, our life, our

community with endowment, particularly in places where no one else is reaching. In a situation like we work in, people are not developing certain activities or understanding certain freedoms. There is a need for people to understand how non-governmental agencies contribute to society, or there is a need for religious leaders to gather with other religious leaders they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to gather with because they come from mono-religious countries. Whatever it is, we have to realize that where the hand cannot reach, we have to reach. We have a responsibility.

Where we are, personally, is we have to keep reviving and revivifying ourselves lest we get distracted and caught in a track that only keeps us in ignorance or arrogance. We have to reinvigorate ourselves and our society. We do that by really understanding that the only success we are going to have is if we hold fast to the *adab* and we manifest the qualities of *futuwwah*. We have to have good *adab*. I don't mean just in the social sense. I don't mean saying the right thing at the right time, for the outer—but for the inner *adab*. That requires humility, *taqwa*, and *khawf*—some degree of fear. It requires an awareness of one's own arrogance and assumptions, an awareness that what you understand most likely is not all that could be understood. It requires not just saying that, but actually acting in that way. If we don't do that—maybe you could get through your life in that way; many people do—but whatever you do will not have the hand of Allah and the Prophet over it. It just won't; it won't last.

I suggest to myself and to all of us that we really take this kind of ascension seriously and *adab* seriously. A person who is mature is not mature because of their age or their college degree, or because of their wealth or power in society. A spiritually mature person on this path sees that those things are, for the most part, distractions. What they concern themselves with are the real tests of their character. From time to time, there are various purposes, powers and gifts that can be bestowed upon an individual that should only be used in a very narrow sense. Sometimes you get a gift to help this person, not everyone. Sometimes you are given monetary help for yourself, for one purpose and not

for other things. You have to be able to be very clear. Among the Sufis, the tendency to use the gifts that Allah has given us is done very carefully and very sparingly. It is explained that you do that so, *inshā'a-llāh*, you don't become distracted, or seduced by or preoccupied with circumstances, activities, people or groups that are concentrating only on the world, only on their selfishness or their ego's pleasure. Rather, you do what you do so that it brings you nearer to Allah, to more aware of that Divine Presence. Literally, you do it while you do *dhikr*. Whatever you do, you do it with sincere *dhikr*.

If we are going to make progress on the path, we have to realize that a very basic means of progress on the path, progress in life, true fulfillment and contentment in life comes when we know our essential self and being. It comes when we know how that essential being in us is capable of engaging and reflecting upon the Attributes of Allah (swt), and is capable of saying, "This is how I live my life. I live my life moving from compassion to mercy, from mercy to peace, from peace to love, from love to justice, from justice to humility, from humility to boundaries which one doesn't go past. That's how I live my life. I see my life in terms of the Attributes/Sifat, and the Asmā' al Husna." You come to realize that the knowledge you gain from that process is the true knowledge. That's real knowledge. That's real understanding.

To act with that knowledge is not just acting with empirical, quantitative or informational knowledge that you manipulate for some purpose or another, maybe to cap an oil well a mile below the sea. That would have much less chance of happening if the people who practiced that work were ethical and moral people who had *taqwa*, who were concerned, and wouldn't do anything unless they had a solution for every problem. You wouldn't want to fly with any of those people as a pilot. It's as simple as that. They are sloppy. They are only interested in themselves.

This satisfaction with one's own self is based on your *adab*, and your humility. It doesn't start tomorrow; it starts tonight. It doesn't start with the next situation; it starts with the

one you are in. It's not: toward others but not your family, and not toward just your family. It is also toward other people. That's the truth of it, like it or don't like it. Understand it or pretend you don't understand it, that's the way it is. Just because you can get away with murder doesn't mean you should be a murderer. Just because you can get away with stealing doesn't mean you should steal. Just because you can get away with being arrogant, doesn't mean you should be arrogant. Just because you can control people and situations doesn't mean you should.

There had better be humility, because if there is not, at the end of the day, something will happen that you will not be able to control. Something will happen that you will forget. The problem also is the fact that we often get lessons and think we learn them, but we use them and manipulate them for our own self aggrandizement. "I'm doing this for this. I learned that lesson, and now I'm doing this." Don't be so sure. We have a lot of difficulties to deal with every day, a lot of demands. We have a lot of hope for the future and angst about the future. If we don't work together it's not just the community that fails. It's everything that it symbolizes that fails. And you can't sit here and tell me it doesn't symbolize something. The work on one side of the community has reached over 675,000 people by our estimate. The work of the spiritual part of the community has reached thousands of people. You can't tell me that what it symbolizes should fail.

Asalaamu aleikum.